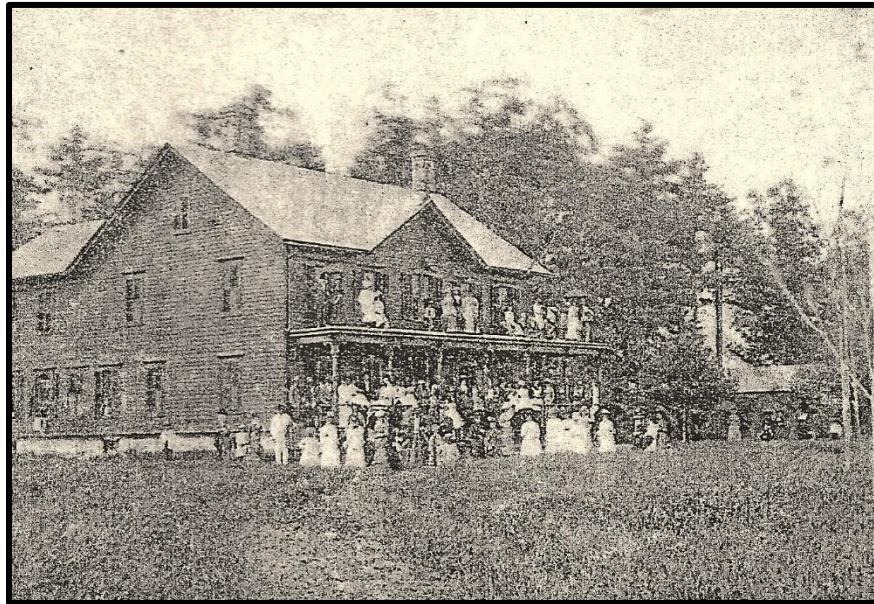


This Week in Saratoga County History

St. Christopher's Cemetery, Eastline, Ballston Spa

Submitted by Rick Reynolds, January 17, 2024

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St. Christopher's Clergy House

The medical experts of the time said that the country air would cure them. And a religious facility would be best to give them proper care. But..... those experts, as well-intentioned as they may have been, were wrong. Many of the children brought here died. And they were buried in a small plot of land in Ballston Spa near the hamlet of Eastline. And their story still haunts us today.

At the northwest corner of Route 67 and Eastline Road sits a sprawling development of high-rise buildings full of apartments, a complex created within the last 6 years. But what was there previously was an important part of the Eastline community in the towns of Ballston and Malta.

St. John's Mission Church opened on November 17, 1876 in a building that sat on current-day Route 67 between Eastline Road and Commerce Drive. Since it was the only church in the area, many of the residents, regardless of their religious persuasion, joined in the services and the activities centered in the church. As time went on, a chapel was built to accommodate the larger and larger crowds which were coming to the church. Then, two other buildings were constructed just to the west of the church, a "Clergy House" for retired ministers to live in and to help out when nearby churches needed a minister as well as a rectory whose cornerstone called it "St.

Michael's and All Angels Cottage- 1883," constructed two years after the building of the Clergy House.

It was during that time that the local newspapers show that the Eastline Mission of Christ Church was growing, attracting a lot of people. In 1882, Rev. Walter Delafield, the founding minister, published "a neat pamphlet [with] information in regard to the [clergy] house and the work connected with it." Other churches contributed money to the Mission. In 1884, three ministers were even assigned to the Clergy House for their two-week vacation.

And it is the Clergy House and All Angels Cottage that tell a very different story from their original designated use for housing ministers. Shortly after these buildings were constructed, financial support for the church dried up and "travelling ministers" seemed to have been in less demand. The Clergy House had to be closed; Reverend Cook, who was the current minister and living there, moved next door to All Angels Cottage; and the Clergy House became a home for something very different, a hospital for sick children.

Child's Hospital in Albany (named for the nuns who ran it, "The Sisterhood of the Holy Child Jesus) sent two nuns, Sisters Helen and Mary to transform the Delafield Clergy House, named for Rev. Walter Delafield who had started the Mission House in Ballston Spa, into what would be called "St. Margaret's Hospital," a summer retreat for sick infants. The children were brought during the first week of May, 1886.

So, from the years 1886-1890, Child's Hospital sent some of its sickest children, many under the age of 1, to the countryside of Eastline in Ballston Spa. The prevailing medical opinion of the time was that getting children out of the city and into the peaceful and less contagious countryside would cure them. Unfortunately, most of the children ended up dying of various diseases.

Surviving records show that the common causes of death were teething, marasmus (severe undernourishment), disease of the brain, and pneumonia.

Local newspapers sometimes reported about the children in this makeshift hospital. On July 4, 1890, almost at the end of the use of the old Clergy House for hospital purposes, The Saratogian reported that there were presently 19 children in residence and that most were suffering from whooping cough.

In some cases, children were transferred back to Child's Hospital. An 1887 Saratogian article describes 25 children being sent back to Albany, but no information is given about their ailments or the resolution of their diseases.

As the children died, almost 60 for whom we have records, they were buried behind the All Angels Cottage, the building next door to their final home while they were alive. Each grave was marked with a fieldstone and Irena Wooten, whose grandparents lived in the All Angels Cottage in the years after the church sold it, remembered also putting little wooden crosses atop each gravesite when springtime came each year. What a beautiful sight it must have been in those years and a fitting memorial to the young people who forever rest there.

As a result of the high death rate at this rural location facilities were constructed in Albany including one that was built in 1890 and named St. Margaret's House, the same name as the hospital in Eastline. Probably not coincidentally, the St. Margaret's in Eastline closed that same year. That ended the medical experiment that had failed at the Eastline village in Ballston and Malta. Long afterwards, the Clergy House burned down in 1942 but All Angels Cottage survived many more years, most recently as a construction office. It has since been torn down.

But what about the cemetery behind All Angels Cottage? Cemeteries are sacred to most people and are protected by state and local laws. But where exactly was it located? The fieldstones that marked the gravesites are long buried and probably moved from their original places. Any wooden crosses would have disintegrated over time. And memories have dulled the exact location of the cemetery that had been located "behind" All Angels Cottage.

In 2007, a developer decided to build an apartment complex on this site, along Route 67 between Commerce Drive and Eastline Road. In order to do so and to follow state laws that mandate an archeological study be done on properties that are considered "historic," he commissioned Curtin Archeological Consulting to try to discover the remains of this cemetery. Unfortunately, no remains were found.

The developer never did build on the site, and in 2016 another developer came onto the scene. As the new owner of the land, he, too, was mandated to do an archeological study. This time, a different site was chosen as the possible site of St. Christopher's Cemetery and the Hartgen Archeological Associates did find remains from graves of the children of the past. However, state law states that there must be physical remains found in order to preserve the site in perpetuity. That was impossible as the coffins, if any, were probably wooden and the babies buried there would leave nothing behind after many years. So, the site, even though now found, could not be preserved. Despite repeated pleas from this historian, the Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and other preservationists, one of the multi-story apartment buildings was built right on top of the children's graves. A sad ending to a long saga of our past.

Sources:

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